



111 years ago



Karl Marx said

“The English Revolution  
began yesterday in Hyde Park”

**ANARCHY Nº 65**  
**2s.or30c.**

**DEREVOLUTIONISATION**  
**MARTIN SMALL**



this issue discusses why it came to nothing



## Contents of No. 65

July 1966

A GREAT DEAL of historical scholarship in the last ten years has been applied to 19th-century labour history. The works of writers like Asa Briggs, John Saville, E. P. Thompson, Roydon Harrison and E. J. Hobsbawm have questioned many earlier assumptions about the growth of the English working class and its political and industrial organisations. Was there a working class, and if so, was it revolutionary, and if so, how were its revolutionary aspirations frustrated? These are the questions which Martin Small asks in the essay to which this issue of ANARCHY is devoted.

## Other issues of ANARCHY

VOLUME 1, 1961: 1. Sex-and-Violence, Galbraith\*; 2. Worker's control†; 3. What does anarchism mean today?; 4. Deinstitutionalisation; 5. Spain 1936†; 6. Cinema†; 7. Adventure playgrounds†; 8. Anthropology; 9. Prison; 10. MacInnes, Industrial decentralisation.

VOLUME 2, 1962: 11. Paul Goodman, A. S. Neill; 12. Who are the anarchists? 13. Direct action; \*14. Disobedience; \*15. The work of David Wills; 16. Ethics of anarchism, Africa; 17. Towards a lumpenproletariat; 18. Comprehensive schools; 19. Theatre: anger and anarchy; 20. Non-violence, Freud; 21. Secondary modern; 22. Cranston's dialogue on anarchy.

VOLUME 3, 1963: 23. Housing, squatters, do-it-yourself; 24. Community of Scholars; 25. Technology, cybernetics; 26. CND, Salesmanship, Thoreau; 27. Youth; 28. The future of anarchism; 29. The Spies for Peace Story; 30. The community workshop; 31. Self-organising systems, Beatniks; the State; 32. Crime; 33. Alex Comfort's anarchism†; 34. Science fiction, Workless teens.

VOLUME 4, 1964: 35. House and home; 36. Arms of the law; 37. Why I won't vote; 38. Nottingham; 39. Homer Lane; 40. Unions and workers' control; 41. The land; 42. Indian anarchism; 43. Parents and teachers; 44. Transport; 45. Anarchism and Greek thought; 46. Anarchism and the historians.

VOLUME 5, 1965: 47. Towards freedom in work; 48. Lord of the flies; 49. Automation; 50. The anarchist outlook; 51. Blues, R'n'b, Pop, Folk; 52. Limits of pacifism; 53. After school; 54. Buber, Landauer, Muhsam; 55. Mutual aid; 56. Women; 57. Law; 58. Stateless societies, homelessness.

VOLUME 6, 1966: 59. The white problem; 60. Drugs; 61. Creative vandalism; 62. Anarchism and organisation.

PLEASE NOTE: Issues 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 13, 14, 33 and 38 are out of print.

## Subscribe to ANARCHY

Single copies 2s. (30c.). Annual Subscription (12 issues) 26s. (\$3.50). By airmail 47s. (\$7.00). Joint annual subscription with FREEDOM the anarchist weekly (which readers of ANARCHY will find indispensable) 42s. (\$6.00). Cheques, P.O.s and Money Orders should be made out to FREEDOM PRESS, 17a Maxwell Road, London, S.W.6, England. Tel.: RENown 3736.

Printed by Express Printers, London, E.1.

## Derevolutionisation

MARTIN SMALL

## 1. Introduction

1. The problem may be stated in the form of two distinct but closely related questions. The first is, whether there was a working class in 19th century England. The second is, whether, if such a class did exist, it was revolutionary. The two questions may be restated as one: did those who earned their living by the work of their hands, in what they experienced and what they felt, find more to bring them together than to divide them from each other; and, if so, was what united them and gave them an interest distinct from the interest of the rest of society—was this common bond an experience and a feeling of the need for and the urge to accomplish a social revolution?

2. In *The Making of the English Working Class* Edward Thompson writes, "When every caution has been made, the outstanding fact of the period between 1790 and 1830 is the formation of 'the working class'." The argument of his book—which he illustrates with a wealth of detail gleaned from Home Office papers and local historical records—is that a sense of class identity and distinctness took shape in the minds and hearts of the English working people during this period, and that this sense was a revolutionary sense. In *The Skilled Labourer* the Hammonds attempted to deny the revolutionary significance of such phenomena as the Luddism of the Midlands in 1811-12, the Pentridge Rising of June, 1817, and the Parliamentary Reform Movement between 1817 and 1820; and tended to argue that all manifestations of revolutionary feeling were at least either exaggerated or partially concocted by government spies. "What is most noticeable in the Hammonds' handling of the sources," writes Thompson, "is a marked disposition to *commence* their research with the assumption that any *bona fide* insurrectionary schemes on the part of working men were either highly improbable or, alternatively, wrong, and undeserving of sympathy, and therefore to be attributed to a lunatic, irresponsible fringe." But, argues Thompson, things being what they were—"the people were subjected simultaneously to an intensification of two intolerable forms of relationship: those of economic exploitation and of political oppression—it might appear more surprising if men *had not* plotted revolutionary uprisings than if they *had*." And if his book served no other purpose, it would deserve gratitude for the way in which it restores to the perhaps crude would-be revolutionaries of this time that human dignity, that appropriateness to their times, that sheer comprehensibility, of which a condescending and unrevolutionary historiography has so often sought to deprive them.<sup>1</sup>



3. Thompson's argument of the naturalness of the revolutionary class consciousness is strengthened by a preliminary analysis in which he demonstrates that it was a more radical reapplication of an old tradition, the tradition of "the free-born Englishman". "Even Old Corruption extolled British liberties; not national honour, or power, but freedom was the coinage of patrician, demagogue and radical alike. . . . And, within this enveloping haze of patriotic self-congratulation, there were other less distinct notions which Old Corruption felt bound to flatter and yet which were to prove dangerous to it in the long run." It was a more radical application of notions which were—or could at least be argued to be—implicit in this tradition and it was inspired by the new sense of what was possible which the French and American revolutions had helped to bring to a head; and of this new sense Thomas Paine was the interpreter. In *The Rights of Man*—and particularly in the outline of a social welfare policy contained in Part Two (published in 1792)—Paine revealed the class identity of the free-born Englishman: the assertion of his rights meant the assertions of the rights of men who were oppressed and denied the privilege of full citizenship *as a class*, and to protest against this oppression was to protest, not against injustice in some generalised form, but against the identifiable and concrete interest of a small, privileged class. Paine discovered within the movement for political recognition its latent social and economic meaning, the demand for a radical change in the structure of society. "What he gave to English people," writes Thompson, "was a new rhetoric of radical egalitarianism, which touched the deepest responses of the 'free-born Englishman' and which penetrated the sub-political attitudes of the working people."<sup>2</sup>

4. The purpose of Thompson's book is to demonstrate the existence and the spread of a truly revolutionary and truly popular feeling in the England of the period between the beginning of the French Revolution and the passing of the first Reform Bill. The execution in 1803 of Colonel Despard, a member of the London Corresponding Society and of the Organisation of United Irishmen, on a charge of high treason; the Luddite movement; the Pentridge Rising; the Parliamentary Reform Movement which reached crisis point with the Peterloo massacre (September, 1819) and the Cato Street Conspiracy (December, 1819–April, 1820): all these were but the peaks of a vast underground turbulence. "We have to imagine the solidarity of the community, the extreme isolation of the authorities," writes Thompson in his lengthy analysis of Luddism. "In the summer of 1812 there were no fewer than 12,000 troops in the disturbed counties, a greater force than Wellington had under his command in the Peninsula. . . . Sheer insurrectionary fury has rarely been more widespread in English history", he writes of the period (the spring of 1812) when attacks upon machinery began to give way to raids for arms: "The months of April to September are months of frequent arms-raids, collections of money, and rumours of oath-taking. Lead (for bullets) disappeared like snow on a warm day; 'pumps and water-spouts are constantly disappearing' (*Leeds Mercury*, June 6, 1812); even dyeing vats and guttering disappeared."<sup>3</sup>

5. On the strength of the picture which he draws Thompson makes some large claims. Jeremiah Brandreth and at least some of his associates in 1817 were not the mere dupes of the government informer "Oliver", but "professional revolutionaries. . . . We may see the Pentridge Rising as one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian insurrection, without any middle-class support." "England, in 1792, had been governed by consent and deference, supplemented by the gallows and the 'Church-and-King' mob. In 1816 the English people were held down by force. Hence post-war Radicalism was at times less a movement of an organised minority than the response of the whole community. . . . The weeks before Peterloo saw scores of small meetings and (week by week) ever more impressive demonstrations in the regional centres: at Manchester and Stockport in June, at Birmingham, Leeds and London in July. The policy of open constitutionalism was proving more revolutionary in its implication than the policy of conspiracy and insurrection. Wooler and Hunt had achieved, without any secret 'correspondencies' or system of delegates, a position in which they could call out a national movement. The election (at Birmingham in July) of Sir Charles Wolseley as 'legislatory attorney' to represent the unrepresented, pointed the way to an even more dangerous development: a National Convention, appointed by Radical suffrage, challenging Parliament. Confronted by the swelling power, Old Corruption faced the alternatives of meeting the reformers with repression or concession. But concession, in 1819, would have meant concession to a largely working-class reform movement; the middle-class reformers were not yet strong enough (as they were in 1832) to offer a more moderate line of advance. This is why Peterloo took place." He claims that there existed, at the time of Peterloo, a revolutionary initiative which the leaders of the reform movement failed to seize: "the two months after Peterloo displayed in its fullest extent the weakness of the national leadership." And this failure is interpreted in classic Marxist fashion as due to their recognition of their true class interest and the threat to it in the revolutionary implications of the reform movement which became manifest in the aftermath of Peterloo, in the preparations which were begun on both sides and which were "preliminaries to civil war". The revolutionary "Cap of Liberty", concludes Thompson, was "lost, somewhere on the way between Peterloo and Cato Street."<sup>4</sup>

6. "I Ham going to inform you", read a paper found in Chesterfield Market which Thompson discovered among the Home Office papers, "that there is Six Thousand men coming to you in Apral and then We Will go and Blow Parlement house up and Blow up all afour hus/labring Peple Cant Stand it No longer/ dam all Such Roges as England governes but Never mind Ned lud when general nody and is harmey Comes We Will soon bring about the greate Revelation then all these greate mens heads gose of." And in 1831 a rioter left a note behind in the cottage of a colliery viewer which he and some friends had raided: "I was at yor hoose last neet, and meyd mysel very comfortable. Ye hey nee family, and yor just won man on the colliery,



I see ye heve a greet lot of rooms, and big cellars, and plenty wine and beer in them, which I got ma share on. Noo I naw some at wor colliery that has three or fower lads and lasses, and they live in won room not half as gude as yor cellar. I don't pretend to naw very much, but I naw there shudn't be that much difference. The only place we can gan to o the week ends is the yel hoose and hev a pint. I dinna pretend to be a profit, but I naw this, and lots o ma marrows na's te, that wer not tret as we owt to be, and a great filosofher says, to get noledge is to naw wer ignerent. But weve just begun to find that oot, and ye maisters and owners may luk oot, for yor not gan to get se much o yor own way, wer gan to hev some of wors now." For all he describes the Pentridge Rising as "one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian insurrection", he warns that, "this is not to suggest that in any circumstances in 1817 a working-class insurrection had any hope of success." "They plotted with home-made grenades", he writes of the London ultra-radicals, "but were unable to erect, in the London streets, a single defended barricade."<sup>5</sup>

7. But, even while describing the Pentridge Rising as "one of the first attempts in history to mount a wholly proletarian insurrection", Thompson cautions that "this is not to suggest that in any circumstances in 1817 a working-class insurrection had any hope of success." Elsewhere he writes of the London Spenceans: "They plotted with home-made grenades, but were unable to erect, in the London streets, a single defended barricade." *The Making of the English Working Class* demonstrates the growth of a political consciousness at once revolutionary and class orientated; and reading the words and studying the deeds of such men as Robert Owen, William Thompson and their followers, we find a vision of a new society manifesting itself in concrete practical activity and attracting the enthusiasm, the loyalty and often the whole lives of working men.<sup>6</sup> But this does not amount to the revolution. Or rather, this is the revolution only in so far as the revolution can be contained and expressed in the life of an individual, or of a sect: which of course it can. But the revolution seeks to extend itself into the lives of all men, and into a social framework which will be at once a witness and a sustenance to the individual life of revolution. Every man endeavouring the revolution in his own life knows that the revolution is universal; he knows that his own affirmation of revolution is but an affirmation of a universal humanity which, while it remains not totally recognized and acknowledged in the life of any man, is incomplete in its reality in his own life; he knows that while one man is in prison he is not free.

8. The social framework required for and by the individual revolution—why and in what way required—the nature of the obstacles to be overcome and of the way effectively to overcome these obstacles—all this was far less clear to these would-be revolutionaries of the early 19th century than was the simple *idea* of a revolution as necessary and just. Peterloo, as Thompson points out, revealed the confusion and disagreement among the reformers concerning what they wanted and how they were to achieve it; and Donald Read's detailed study of

the massacre and its background and aftermath shows that the political attitude which did best for itself out of the massacre—was best able to use it to organise public opinion—was the attitude, not of the diehard Tories nor of the uncompromising revolutionaries, but of the middle-class reformers who simply wanted to make government cheaper and more efficient. In his study of the 1831-32 Reform Bill crisis Joseph Hamburger has suggestively if not quite conclusively argued that the middle-class reformers used the device and threat of revolution merely to give added plausibility and point to their argument for reform, and that there was a large measure of scepticism concerning the threat of revolution among not only the reformers but also among the members of the Whig and Tory ruling class. And in an article which expressly sets out to demolish Thompson's thesis, R. N. Soffer has made it clear that quite unrevolutionary or at least un-class-conscious forms of discontent continued to exist alongside the new forms.<sup>7</sup> The process which gave birth to the great hope of revolution gave birth also to its twin, the myth of the counter-revolution. The myth of the counter-revolution is the myth of the impossibility and undesirability of the revolution: the impossibility of the revolution achieving what it sets out to achieve, and the undesirability of what it would achieve: it is the myth of the revolution as, not that which must be achieved as the natural and only worthy fruit of human freedom, but that which must above all other things be avoided as the certain destruction and absolute denial of freedom. In one sense the myth which counters the revolution is simply the means of dispossessing the dispossessed of the last refuge of their humanity, their consciousness of their condition; and derevolutionarisation is the process whereby the promise of the revolution is tricked, cheated, compromised and sold short. All this is true, if melodramatic; but it is also true that the proposition, of the revolution and of a complete satisfaction of human freedom, can also benefit from the myth of the counter-revolution and from the process of derevolutionarisation, by means of both of which men are educated by negation in the reality, in the existence, of the revolution.

## 2. Interpretations and attitudes: Francis Place and Samuel Bamford

9. Among the first English working men of the 19th century to experience the appeal and the obscurity of the revolution were the weaver-poet of Middleton, Samuel Bamford (1788-1872) and Francis Place (1771-1854), the radical tailor of Charing Cross. Both in their different ways were politically active at the time of the Peterloo Massacre, and both at different times interpreted its significance in the political development of the country as a whole and of their own class in particular. Writing of the Parliamentary Reform Movement, in the month after Peterloo, Place wrote: "In spite of the demoralising influence of many of our laws, and the operation of the poor-laws, it has impressed the morals and manners, and elevated the character of the working-man. I speak from observation made on thousands of them, and I hold up this fact as enough of itself to satisfy any man not wholly ignorant of human nature as a very portentous circumstance. Look



even to Lancashire. Within a few years a stranger walking through their towns was 'touted', i.e. hooted, and an 'outcomling' was sometimes pelted with stones. 'Lancashire brute' was the common and appropriate appellation. Until very lately it would have been dangerous to have assembled 500 of them on any occasion. Bakers and butchers would at the least have been plundered. Now 100,000 people may be collected together and no riot ensue, and why? Why, but for the fact before stated, that the people have an object, the pursuit of which gives them importance in their own eyes, elevates them in their own opinion, and thus it is that the very individuals who would have been the leaders of the riot are the keepers of the peace. In every place as reform has advanced, drunkenness has retreated, and you may assume that a cause which can operate so powerfully as to produce such a change, is capable of producing almost anything. It must continue to operate still more and more extensively. It will not be materially retarded, and cannot by any means be extinguished—as it is the result of conviction in the minds of the people of their own importance, and not the ebullitions of enthusiasm—although that at times has its effects; it will not subside into indifference, notwithstanding its energies will only be displayed at intervals, and under peculiar circumstances.”<sup>8</sup>

10. Place was a follower of Malthus and one of the most trusted disciples of Bentham and James Mill. “To be esteemed and confided in by the wise and good”, he wrote to the latter in October 1814, “was the great end I always pursued and your letter tells me that I have both deserved and obtained it from one whom everybody considers pre-eminently good and wise.” From being a journeyman breeches-maker blacklisted by employers for his part in an unsuccessful strike Place journeyed by means of prudence and perseverance to a position of economic independence as a tailor employing workmen of his own. “A man to be a good tailor”, he afterwards wrote, “should be either a philosopher or a mean cringing slave, whose feelings had never been excited to the pitch of manhood. One or the other he must be if he start poor and hope to succeed in making a considerable business. He who is neither the one nor the other, will never be anything but a little master, and will probably die in debt. I had three things continually in my recollection:—The first, and by far the most important, was to get money, and yet to avoid entertaining a mercenary, money-getting spirit; to get money as a means to an end, and not for its own sake. The second was to take care that the contumelious treatment I had to endure should not make me a sneaking wretch from principle to those above me, a tyrant to those below me. The third was to beware of presumption, that I did not become arrogant. I had no doubt of success, and therefore felt most strongly the necessity of watching and guarding myself, in the hope that when I had realised as much money as I deemed requisite to a state of independence, my habits should not be such as would exclude me from what is called good society, if at any time I should desire such society and should be occasionally cast into it, or should not exclude me from the acquaintance and even friendship of the better sort of men of genius and talent.”<sup>9</sup>

11. In Place's eyes the best friends of the working-class—those who taught them best how to achieve that position of independence and social recognition that he had himself achieved—were the political economists. “That there has been,” he wrote in John Gast's *Trades' Newspaper and Mechanics' Weekly* in 1826, “and that there is, the means of subsistence for the people, is proved by their being alive. But the political economists are not satisfied with this; they want something better for the people, they are not satisfied that those who exist should *barely exist*—that they should have low wages, and no leisure, and no pleasure, no recreation, and no instruction. They are not satisfied that their number should be constantly kept up to the starvation point, and that hunger, disease, and misery, should be the only means of keeping down their number.” In Place's eyes the key to the social emancipation of the working class lay in their moral self-improvement. As his biographer says, “he could work for education, democracy, freedom of combination, everything that tended to the general diffusion of knowledge and self-respect, because he believed that knowledge and self-respect were not only good in themselves, but likely to lead to a restraint of population. Once men had become wise on that one point, he was prepared to welcome economic equality, though on an individual basis, as readily as political equality.”<sup>10</sup>

12. While his adherence to the classical political economy—which did not prevent him reproving Malthus for failing to point out that the idleness of the rich was no less reprehensible than the idleness of the poor—meant that Place never achieved a radical criticism of the process of industrial capitalism, it would be unjust to deny him a real sympathy with the class which he always regarded as his own. It would be foolish, similarly, to deny that he produced a theory of their political progress which had the appeal of his own strong belief in it. For the traditional ruling class and their taste for miserable expedients and personal comfort—a class who, as he wrote to his friend Joseph Parkes at the time of the trial of the Tolpuddle Martyrs (1834), “have no energy in any case except against the common people”—he had no respect. For his own class he felt a strong affection; and he helped William Lovett to draft the People's Charter and its “six points”<sup>†</sup> in the early months of 1838. “The most active and well-informed among the people,” he wrote in explanation to his friend Joseph Hume, “seeing themselves utterly abandoned by those who had promised at the hustings to be their friends, began to stir for themselves, at first with very small numbers, for a reform of Parliament on the broadest possible plan. And their numbers increased with wonderful celerity, and at length they have produced an agitation not at all contemplated or even believed to be possible by those whose condition in life was above them, and have in a very short time been the cause of immense numbers of people in various places coming into active service. This is a *new* feature in society produced by the increased intelligence of the working

<sup>†</sup>The “six points” of the Charter were: universal manhood suffrage; vote by ballot; annual Parliaments; abolition of the property qualification for Members of Parliament; payment of Members of Parliament; equal electoral districts.



people. This is the first time that the desire for reform has been moved by them (the working people) and carried upwards. Until now it has always proceeded downwards, and expired when abandoned, as it always has been, by their gentlemen leaders. It will not again expire, but will go on continually, sometimes with more, sometimes with less, rapidly, but on it will go." He was disappointed by the foolishness of the Chartist Convention held in London in the spring of 1839, but he never lost hope. "It should be remembered", he wrote in his last work (an unfinished history of Chartism written during 1840-43), "that every attempt to reform any old institution has necessarily been made by enthusiastic but not well-informed men, who saw but a small portion of the impediments which made their present success impossible. Such men are always, and necessarily, ignorant of the best means of progressing towards the accomplishment of their purpose at a distant time, and can seldom be persuaded that the time for their accomplishment is distant. Few, indeed, such would interfere at all unless they imagined what they desired was at hand. They may be considered as pioneers who, by their labours and their sacrifices, smooth the way for those who are to follow them. Never without such persons to move forward, and never but through their errors and misfortunes, would mankind have emerged from barbarism, and gone on as they have done, slow and painful as their progress has been."<sup>11</sup>

13. Bamford's account and interpretation of Peterloo are given in the autobiography which he began to write 20 years later, in 1839, in the London to which he had gone to seek a livelihood as a writer, where he served as a special constable in 1848, and from which he retired in disgust in his last years to his old trade of weaving in his native town. The declared object of his book was to describe and explain the 1815-19 Parliamentary Reform Movement, which for him had culminated in and ended at Peterloo, so that the lessons he had learnt might be learnt by a later generation of would-be radical reformers without their having to undergo his painful experience. The object of the meeting held in St. Peter's Field, he says, was to demonstrate that the people of England were able to sue for their rights in a decent and orderly fashion: this would give the lie to their enemies who wrote them off as an undisciplined and lawless rabble; and from Bamford's own account a seriousness of purpose and a cheerful resolution seem to have been the outstanding characteristics of the demonstration. But in the chapter in which he sums up the lessons of his experience he rejects such an optimistic view. "For a nation to be free, it is sufficient that she wills it", and we may add that, a nation cannot be free, unless she does will it. We thought the will to be free already existed—foolish thought—we looked for the fruit ere the bloom was come forth; we expected will when there was no mind to produce it, to sustain it; for rational will is the result of mind, not of passion; and that mind did not then exist, nor does it now." And a few pages later he concluded: "One evening spent in the acquirement of useful knowledge—in rational conversation—in the promotion of kindly feeling—in the restraints of sobriety—in the comforting of families—in the

blessings of children, and the improvement of their hearts and understandings—in the devisements of cheerful economy and industry—in the feeling of mercy towards all God's creatures, and of love of all goodness, for his sake; one evening so spent, were to thyself and thy country, worth more than all thou hast seen, heard, or done, at radical or Chartist meetings, since sunlight or torchlight first illuminated them."<sup>12</sup>

14. In the spring of 1815 Major Cartwright had circulated throughout England petitions for parliamentary reform, demanding annual Parliaments, equal electoral districts, and the enfranchisement of all direct taxpayers. In January, 1817, at a meeting in London of delegates from Hampden Clubs all over the country presided over by Cartwright, Bamford—the Middleton delegate—succeeded in persuading the meeting to ask for universal manhood and not simply taxpayer suffrage; and Cobbett himself publicly testified to the decisive influence upon him of the arguments of the "Middleton delegate". In April Bamford was among the Lancashire reformers who were arrested on a charge of high treason and examined before the Privy Council. The account of his arrest and imprisonment which Bamford published later the same year indicates the high moralistic strain of Bamford's attitude towards parliamentary reform. "I acknowledged myself to be a Reformer and until the measure was obtained, I always was and always should be an advocate for it; that no circumstance or situation whatever could induce me to disavow my political opinion, nay, I considered it as the pride and glory of my life, to have adopted, and I trusted in some measure to have merited the title of a Reformer; but I never had been an advocate for obtaining this measure by violence. I had before time trusted and had endeavoured to infuse the same confidence into my poor neighbours, that when our grievances and sufferings were properly expressed to parliament, attention would be paid to them. We had done so, but unfortunately, our petitions were not listened to; I could not tell how to account for this, save through the corruption that existed in that honourable house; but still I was not, neither had I ever been a person that recommended violence; as I firmly believed, that reform would ultimately take place, that circumstances would in their own due time occur, which would induce His Majesty's Ministers and parliament to take the matter into consideration; I had always been an enemy to private meetings; I had never been at one in my life, for I had deprecated them as much as possible, that the cause of Reform had no need of privacy, and finally nothing but Reform in my opinion, could save the country from destruction."<sup>13</sup>

15. Two years later, in the aftermath of Peterloo, Thompson finds Bamford in a spy's account in the Home Office papers buying a pike and at the hush-shop where the transaction was settled giving the toast: "May the Tree of Liberty be planted in Hell, and may the bloody Butchers of Manchester be the Fruit of it!" And Bamford himself admits in his autobiography that along with many others he entertained thoughts of a wild and bloody vengeance from which he was dissuaded by the arguments of his good friend John Kay.<sup>14</sup>



16. But the unrevolutionary condition of the reformers' psychological processes was but a reflection of the unrevolutionary situation of the country as a whole. The revolution, then as now, existed as a condition of society only *in posse* and not *in esse*: it existed in the minds of men, in the minds of all men, though indeed existing in the minds of some so obscurely and inactively as to be discernible by the eye of faith alone. Somewhat sententiously Bamford presents his faith in the moral capacity of his countrymen as sorely tried in the months after Peterloo during which he stoically underwent trial, sentence and imprisonment. Bamford, Henry Hunt and two other reformers were found guilty of conspiring to disturb the peace and were sentenced to a year's imprisonment (Hunt, to two years). After a preliminary trial the accused men were allowed out on bail: the acclamation of the populace accompanied their—and particularly Henry Hunt's—return to Manchester. "I contrasted all this glare and noise", claimed Bamford in his autobiography, "with the useful results of calm, sober thought, and silent determination, and I made up my mind that, when once out of this, I would not in future be any part in such trumpery exhibitions; in the unworthy setting up of the instrument, instead of the principle of a great cause." And when he left his home town to walk to London to hear his sentence pronounced, the averted eyes of his fellow-townsmen—their embarrassed words of farewell—demonstrated to him the insubstantiality of popular passion, the vanity of popular applause. And in prison the petty behaviour of his fellow-prisoners revealed to him still greater depths of insubstantiality: "the boroughmongers had incarcerated my body, but the reformers wounded my soul."<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Thomas Cooper and Chartism

17. The Chartist movement continued the debate on the revolution. The discussion of the respective uses of moral and physical force revealed how much disagreement and how much lack of clarity there was among Chartists concerning the nature of the revolution they wanted to achieve. What relationship the Chartist movement ought to bear towards the middle-class reform movement—which in the 1830's and early 1840's was concentrating its energies in the Anti-Corn Law League—was the question which tested most crucially the revolutionary determination of the individual Chartist. In April, 1842, John Bright attended a meeting of the Complete Suffrage Movement organised by Joseph Sturge in an attempt to merge the two movements. Bright reported back to his friend Cobden: "There were about 100 delegates present—amongst them were Lovett, Collins, Vincent, O'Brien, and Richardson of Salford—I think Lovett a very fine man in every way—and Vincent has a fine honest and warm heart—but all behaved very well, and seemed delighted at the probability of a better order of things. They are I believe as anxious as we are to put down the O'Connor ruffianism—we affirmed the principle of complete suffrage—Ballot—equal electoral districts—no property qualification for members—payment of legal election expenses and a fair remuneration to members

by the State, and declared, that to secure proper control over representatives annual parls were a proper means—thus leaving it open as to their being the only proper means—I tried for a resolution in favor of not less than one year nor more than three years, leaving the precise point to be fixed hereafter, but failed in the attempt." Some O'Connors from Bradford who attempted to disrupt the meeting were "discountenanced" by Lovett: "I have never attended", Bright concluded "a more satisfactory conference."<sup>16</sup>

18. The Complete Suffrage Movement came to an end in December, 1842, when the middle-class reformers refused to accept the "name" of "the Charter" and "Chartists". Some Chartists thought that this refusal testified to an insincerity and an obtuseness among the middle-class reformers which was not necessarily ineradicable; other Chartists wondered whether middle-class reformers could ever be sincere advocates of the cause of the working class. Lovett himself, who had decisively spoken up for "the Charter" at the December conference, believed in the need for an independent working-class movement; but wished for such a movement, not in order radically to alter the structure of society in the interests simply of the working class, but in order to bring about a more effective union in the end—as one between equals rather than between superior and inferior—between the middle and working classes. Lovett was a seaman's son who walked from Penzance to London to get work; he became a cabinet-maker and, later, president of the cabinet-makers' union; he was active in the Owenite movements of the 1820's and opened his public political career with a petition to parliament for the opening of museums on Sundays; in 1837 he was one of the founders of the "London Working Men's Association for benefiting politically, morally and socially the useful classes". When he and his friend John Collins, a tool-maker, were sent to prison for a year (1839-40) on a charge of sedition, they wrote a tract calling for a "new organisation of the people": it was addressed to the working class in general and to Chartists in particular, and proposed that the working class themselves should by shilling weekly subscriptions finance their own national educational system and thereby confound their enemies, not by force, but by love and reason. "When they find the spirit of temperance and sobriety pervading the ranks of labour, daily diminishing the amount of drunkenness and dissipation—when they perceive an enlightened and enquiring mind generating other feelings and habits among them—when they see them struggling for political rights as means of improving their class and dignifying their country, can those objectors any longer refuse to aid them in their great and noble undertaking?" Thus the object of an independent working-class political movement is simply to "create and extend an enlightened public opinion in favour of the People's Charter, such as shall *peaceably* cause its enactment."<sup>17</sup>

19. Chartism represented an independent political attitude initiated by the working class themselves; but should this independent initiative be continued as far as the creation of an entirely different—entirely working class—social system, or was it simply a means of bringing



about a better accommodation of the working class to the existing system? For all their sincerity and intelligence even the most radical of the Chartist leaders seemed unable to conceive—or at least consistently and unremittingly to maintain—a fundamental and irreconcilable antagonism between the interests of capital and those of labour. Marx and Engels took great pains to educate Ernest Jones in the theory of the class struggle, and in 1856 the latter wrote to Holyoake refusing to take part in some conference of middle-class and working-class reformers: “The Chartist body is the only powerful organisation in existence and one, which experience must have taught you, no separatist movement can successfully oppose, from whatever class it may emanate. The Chartist organisation is now rapidly progressing towards national ascendancy, and the hour of its final victory is, you may rest assured, very near at hand. Under these circumstances I cannot see any utility in my attending your meeting.” But two years later Jones himself called a conference in order to test the sincerity of the middle-class reformers and if possible to unite them with the working-class reformers in an agitation for manhood suffrage and the abolition of the property qualification for members of parliament; and on the eve of the second Reform Bill he is endeavouring to persuade Marx that the exclusion of the “residuum” from the electorate is not as undemocratic as it seems.<sup>18</sup>

20. The explanation of this equivocal position is best looked for in the disillusionment with violence, the conviction of its futility, and the corresponding tendency to place a greater reliance upon and faith in moral progress. Such a state of mind and such an attitude disposed a man to look hopefully at the possibility of the nonviolent dissolution of the worst features of capitalism and a moralisation of the economy as a whole brought about by love and reason alone. Thomas Cooper tried to construct such an alternative vision to the prospect of violent revolution in the philosophical epic, *The Purgatory of Suicides*, which he wrote during his two years’ imprisonment (1843-45) for his part in the Pottery Riots of the autumn of 1842. (He was first acquitted on a charge of arson, and then, at a new trial, found guilty of sedition and conspiracy.) In August, 1842, on his way to attend the Manchester Chartist convention as the delegate for Leicester, he found himself and his eloquence the unwitting precipitator of riot and destruction—on the very night he left for Manchester “scenes were being enacted in Hanley, the possibility of which had never entered my mind, when I so urgently urged those excited thousands to work no more till the People’s Charter became the law of the land. I had caught the spirit of the oppressed and discontented thousands,” he wrote in his autobiography 30 years later, “and, by virtue of my nature and constitution, struck the spark which kindled all into combustion.” That this was not his immediate conclusion is evidenced by his own report of the speech he made in his defence when he was tried for arson in October: “I sketched my own life, and asked the Jury if they could believe any intent of urging men to the destruction of property could dwell in the mind of one who had spent so much of his life in mental and moral

cultivation?”<sup>19</sup>

21. But in his autobiography he finds himself guilty of a silent if never explicit or wholly accepted complicity with the violent counsels of the desperate men whom he met in Leicester. He arrived in Leicester in November, 1840, to edit the *Leicestershire Mercury* and to continue the intellectual studies which he had begun when, as a shoemaker, he had spent his leisure moments learning Latin, Greek and Hebrew and in the study of theological works. It was in Leicester that he first came into close contact with the violence and murderousness of the social system which he denounced in a “sermon” to the Staffordshire colliers two years later on the text, “Thou shalt not kill”. In Leicester he found that handloom weavers were earning, not 4s. 6d. a day, as he first thought, but 4s. 6d. a week—when trade was good. “The more I learned of the state of the poor, the less inclined I felt to settle down and study. The accounts of wretchedness, and of petty oppressions, and the fierce defiance of their employers uttered by working men at public meetings, kept me in perpetual uneasiness, and set me thinking what I ought to do. The issue was that I resolved to become the champion of the poor. ‘What is the acquirement of languages—what is the obtaining of all knowledge’, I said to myself, ‘compared to the real honour, whatever seeming disgrace it may bring, of struggling to win the social and political rights of millions?’” He was dismissed from the *Leicestershire Mercury*, and took on the task of producing the local Chartist paper; he helped to organize a Chartist Temperance Society, Sunday school, and—during the week—evening classes. “Unless there were some stirring local or political topic, I lectured on Milton, and repeated portions of *Paradise Lost*, or on Shakespeare, and repeated portions of *Hamlet*, or on Burns, and repeated *Tam o’ Shanter* or I recited the history of England, and set the portraits of great Englishmen before young Chartists, who listened with intense interest; or I took up Geology or even Phrenology.” But he could not do enough: he was oppressed by a sense of his own futility and of the desperateness of the situation he was working in: “My heart often burned with an indignation I knew not how to express. Nay—there was something worse. I began—from sheer sympathy—to feel a tendency to glide into the depraved thinkings of some of the stronger but coarser spirits among the men.”<sup>20</sup>

22. Even the cathartic influence of imprisonment could not wholly, or at least not at once, eradicate the tendency to violence. In Book II of *The Purgatory of Suicides* the approach of night, which “Some scanty sleep to England’s slaves dost bring”, reminds him of the misery of the English working man:

Is there no heart

Among ye stung to see the puny elves,  
His children, daily die; his wife dispart  
Her hair, and glare in madness? Doth the smart  
Of slavery cease to rankle in your veins?  
Faint, though ye be, and feeble, will none start  
Unto his feet, and cry, while aught remains  
In him of life—“Death! or deliverance from our chains”?



Cowards! do ye believe all men are like  
 Yourselves?—that craven fear doth paralyse  
 Each English arm until it dares not strike  
 A tyrant?—that no voice could exorcise  
 Old Tyler's spirit, and impel to rise  
 Millions omnipotent in vengeful ire?

He writes bitter stanzas in memory of the Newport rising of 1839 and of John Frost, whose sentence of death was commuted to one of transportation for life (he was later pardoned and allowed to return to England): a footnote on this, perhaps the one serious Chartist attempt at an armed uprising, reveals Cooper's dilemma, his attempt to reach beyond violence to some other, but equally radical method: "Reflection, and, above all, *prison-reflection*, has, indeed, done much to impress me with the belief that a resort to force, under any circumstances, is indefensible, either as a wise or a just proceeding; but, for the life of me, I cannot subdue the feeling of an Englishman when the picture starts before my imagination of Hampden on Chalgrove Field 'drawing the sword and throwing away the scabbard'."<sup>21</sup>

23. The poem is an attempt to imagine the real revolution which will finally sweep away all distinctions between men. Its theme is man's struggle for freedom—his search for a form of individual and social life which will satisfy and fulfil his nature, the nature of all men. Famous suicides of the ancient and modern world discuss the institution of monarchy: in discussing its permanence and naturalness they debate its human significance—the compatibility of its existence with the full development of the individual's powers of thought and action is the hidden meaning, the real bearing, of the debate. Lysurgus the Spartan acts as the spokesman of the moral and rational nature of man the full flowering of which will eventually bring about the downfall of monarchy; Tiberius Gracchus, "the Agrarian", advances to an assembly of kings still jealous of their dignity and splendour the argument that surely they must have felt at times that a truer dignity and splendour is to be found in sharing the joys and sorrows of their fellow-men, than in triumphing over and trampling upon them in gorgeous palaces; and Otho—presumably the Roman emperor—nobly renounces the illusory splendour of his regal state for the true form of happiness. And at the end of the poem the reader learns

How persevering love won ev'n the foes  
 Who thirsted for their blood to doff their rude  
 And murderous frowns, and smilingly disclose  
 The heart's regenerate kindness; how the throes  
 Of pain they conquered, and, triumphing, hurled  
 Thralldom, revenge, hate, envy, all Man's woes,  
 For ever, from the groaning, bleeding world.<sup>22</sup>

24. The theme of the non-violent overthrow of power and privilege was continued in *Cooper's Journal: or, Unfettered Thinker and Plain Speaker for Truth, Freedom and Progress*, of which 30 numbers were published in 1850. That the true enemy of human freedom is within every man, and that no political emancipation can save him unless it is established on a firm moral and intellectual base, was the argument of the *Journal's* very first article in which Cooper discussed the election

of Louis Napoleon as president of the French Republic. "Should not this sad catastrophe of struggles so hopefully begun, teach us, more than ever, to labour earnestly for the increase of intelligence in our own intelligent people—and, then, that the franchise when won, may be more speedily successful, by its being the universal demand of an intelligent people—and then, that the franchise when won, may be preserved unimpaired, by being wisely exercised?" "Toil, Brothers, Toil!" writes an anonymous "Power Loom Operative":

We all must toil, in the mine of thought,  
 From its greatest depths rich gems are brought;  
 Or we toil in vain to sever the chain  
 By the power and craft of tyrants wrought.<sup>23</sup>

25. "A Country Walk" illustrates the danger that the internalisation of the revolution may lead to the neglect of its relevance to society or of society's relevance to it. "He that lives within a reasonable distance of open fields and green lanes, has an estate, pleasure, and profit, at his command." The writer goes on to argue that such a man can feel and enjoy his humanity and freedom whether the government under which he lives be monarchical, republican or democratic. The man who has great possessions or great power is no better off: "His wealth will enable him to surround himself with the choicest productions of nature and art. But the pleasure they are capable of affording, that for which they are alone valuable, can neither be purchased nor inherited." The argument of the social quietism of which Samuel Smiles made himself the most conspicuous advocate is that, since a man is never in a position where it is impossible for him to improve his moral position by means of self-help, therefore social reform is irrelevant or at best unimportant: thus, "opportunities", wrote Smiles in *Self-Help* a few years later, "fall in the way of every man who is resolved to take advantage of them. . . . Even in the lowliest calling, the true worker may win the very loftiest results. . . . Even the meanest condition may be made useful; for the light set in a low place shines as faithfully as that set upon a hill. Everywhere, and under almost all circumstances, however externally adverse—in moorland shielings, in cottage hamlets, in the close alleys of great towns—the true man may grow. He who tills a space of earth scarce bigger than is needed for his grave, may work as faithfully, and to as good purpose, as the heir to thousands. The commonest workshop may thus be a school of industry, science, and good morals, on the one hand; or of idleness, folly and depravity, on the other. It all depends on the individual men, and the use they make of the opportunities for good which offer themselves."<sup>24</sup>

26. But, on the one hand, the contributors to *Cooper's Journal* were too close to the material situation of the oppressed to ignore its effect on the individual's moral nature. And while they might deplore the failures in self-discipline of their fellow-workers, they jealously resented any condescending criticism—as when Smiles himself wrote in *The Leader* that the moral progress of the working class had not kept pace with the improvement in their material conditions. "If I were asked", wrote one correspondent, commenting on Smiles's criti-



cisms, "what was the great antidote for low habits and drunkenness; I should answer—ordinary and regular labour and high wages. It may be said, that more money is expended in drink in times of good trade than is so expended in times of bad trade. This does not injure my position in the least. I contend that what is called good trade is only an unnatural and unregulated activity; what is called bad trade is an exhausted prostration of energy. Both states are intemperate and unnatural and lead to intemperate and unnatural results."<sup>25</sup>

27. Writing in his *The English Republic* in 1851—most of the few hundred copies printed he gave away—the wood-engraver and Republican polemicist and poet, William James Linton, accused his fellow Chartists of lacking a plan of revolution or indeed any organization at all. "From first to last Chartism has never had a real intention—that is to say, a clear resolve, TO ACT, and consequently it has never made even an endeavour at the organization which is necessary for successful action." And 30 years later, in *The Century Magazine* (New York, January, 1882), he declared that the Chartist movement had been "a protest; we had no plan beyond that." Chartism was a protest with no plan but a hope. To return to *Cooper's Journal*:

Trust the future! men are growing  
Wiser with each circling sun;  
Seeds of love and truth are sowing,  
Germinating one by one.

Another poet described the progress of the working class as "resistless and free as the mighty March wind"; "Ours is the mighty future", declared the secretary of the Christian Socialist Board, Gerald Massey, the son of a canal boatman who at the age of eight was put to work in a silk mill from 5 a.m. to 6 p.m., who published his first book of poems in 1848 at the age of 20 and afterwards had the distinction of an introduction to his *Complete Poetical Works* (1861) written by Samuel Smiles, and who two years later was granted a civil list pension of £70 p.a. (increased to £100 in 1887).<sup>\*</sup> And one of the best things Cooper himself wrote for the *Journal* was his prophetic warning of the approaching end of the old order inspired by the sight of the Duke of Wellington going to pay his respects to Queen Victoria: "Like the principle of Order which he has represented and fought for—he is in his superannuation; and all his decorations only serve to make it more apparent. The last struggle is taking place with him—and with Kings, Popes, and President-Pretenders; and all their shew and pretence of security cannot hide it. They belong to the Age-that-was, and their trappings too. The present age feels this, and groans to be delivered from both." It is a deliverance which may be postponed, but cannot be put off for ever. "It is in the very nature of things, that it should be so. Let mind grow—strengthen—deepen—widen; and when false 'Order' with its bloodshed and tinsel die out, true Order shall make a peaceful, happy and rational world." "A revolution is going on in

<sup>\*</sup>In his old age a private subscription, to which the ubiquitous philanthropic manufacturer Samuel Morley contributed £100 and Carlyle £10, was got up to provide Cooper also with a pension of £100 p.a.

England now," wrote Gerald Massey in February, "more effective than any yet witnessed on the continent. True, we are not pulling down thrones, crowns, prisons, and bastilles, by force of arms. Yet we are destroying piece-meal the ground on which they are built: so that when they fall, they fall for ever; and this is better than to demolish them, and yet leave our enemies the place and power wherewith to build others."<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Robert Owen and the trade union and co-operative movements

28. A very important part of the explanation of the confidence of the Chartists and other revolutionaries or reformers of 19th-century England is the apparent vulnerability and superficiality of the early capitalist organization of the economy. The crudeness of the organizational and ideological techniques of early capitalism seemed to be evidence of the impermanence and insubstantiality of its hold upon society: its lack of sophistication and poise—its still largely unsuspected and undeveloped potential to sink its roots deep into the social and even more the psychological framework of people's lives and to fortify itself within some of the most precious prejudices and fears of men—made it seem, not idealistic, but quite realistic, to regard capitalism but as a transitional stage, an experiment, a provisional choice; an alternative to which might with relative ease be proposed, accepted and established. "An entire change in society—a change amounting to a complete subversion of the existing 'order of the world'—is contemplated by the working classes", wrote Bronterre O'Brien (the "School-master of Chartism") in *The Poor Man's Guardian* in October, 1833. "They aspire to be at the top instead of at the bottom of society—or rather that there should be no bottom or top at all."<sup>27</sup> The first man to propound a theory of the way such "an entire change" infallibly and with the greatest simplicity could and indeed would be brought about—the man whose teaching remained perhaps the greatest single influence upon the English working-class movement during the 19th century—was Robert Owen.

29. When the superior classes to whom Owen first spoke of the reorganization of society, showed themselves unsusceptible to his vision of the new moral order, he turned to those who might have been expected to see more clearly—to feel more personally—the evils of the competitive, individualist organization of society and the advantages of mutual aid and co-operation: the working class. "The working classes," wrote a correspondent in the *Economist* as early as October, 1821, "if they will but exert themselves *manfully*, have no need to solicit the smallest assistance from any *other* class, but have within themselves . . . superabundant resources." The peculiar idea of Owenism—once he had learnt the impossibility of a revolution being initiated from "above"—was that a total transformation of society could be developed from small beginnings. A small community by actually working together co-operatively would demonstrate practically and irrefutably the superiority—in sheer human value—of such an organization of society over the competitive organization required by



"possessive individualism". When the community at New Harmony in America which he founded in 1825—and which was afterwards taken over and successfully run by German Rappists—disappointed his hopes and expectations, Owen returned to England in 1827 to find that in the very heart of the old order the ideas of the new order were taking root and receiving application. In 1821 some working printers and their friends had founded the "Co-operative and Economical Society", which carried on propagandist activity and also ran a small co-operative settlement. It was succeeded by the London Co-operative Society (1824), which in 1826 started the Co-operative Community Fund Association. In 1827 a trading store was organized, partly in order to accumulate the profits which would otherwise have gone to middlemen, partly in order to experience the benefits of economy and mutual self-help which would later be the characteristics of a whole community. But it was above all in the trade unions and the trade unionist form of organization that Owen now placed his hope of revolution. "The Trades Unions will not only strike for less work, and more wages," wrote "A Member of the Builder's Union" (*Man*, December 22, 1833), "but they will ultimately ABOLISH WAGES, become their own masters, and work for each other; labour and capital will no longer be separate but they will be indissolubly joined together in the hands of the workmen and workwomen." In 1834 Owen founded the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Instituted for the Purpose of the More Effectually Enabling the Working Classes to Secure, Protect and Establish the Rights of Industry; the union at one time claimed a membership of over 500,000 during the brief year of its existence; No. 46 of its "Rules and Regulations" read: "That although the design of the Union is, in the first instance, to raise the wages of workmen, or prevent any further reduction therein, and to diminish the hours of labour, the great and ultimate object of it must be to establish the paramount rights of Industry and Humanity, by instituting such measures as shall effectually prevent the ignorant, idle and useless part of Society from having that undue control over the fruits of our toil, which, through the agency of a vicious money system, they at present possess; and that, consequently, the Unionists should lose no opportunity of mutually encouraging and assisting each other in bringing about A DIFFERENT ORDER OF THINGS, in which the really useful and intelligent part of society only shall have the direction of its affairs, and in which well-directed industry and virtue shall meet their just distinction and reward, and vicious idleness its merited contempt and destitution."<sup>28</sup>

30. The persistence of the Owenite vision of the co-operative society, of the near approach and actual accessibility of such a society, the continuing strong appeal of that vision to the working class—and to conscientious members of the upper and middle classes, was studied and chronicled in great detail by the then manager of the London branch of the Wholesale Co-operative Society, Benjamin Jones, in an account of *Co-operative Production* published first in instalments in the *Co-operative News* and then in book form by Oxford University Press in

1894. But Jones's account, while proving the persistence of the vision, shows also that the clarity and lack of ambiguity which the idea of co-operation was at first thought to possess, disappeared when men began to apply it and found it, neither the revolution nor the straight path to the "different order of things" which it had once seemed to be, but a technique of organization as well as a spirit in individual men, and, as a technique, susceptible of diversion to and association with the achievement of quite other ends, with consequences which perturbed and confused the spirit. Over the supporters, propagators and self-proclaimed practitioners of co-operation the principles and practices of the exclusivist individualism of the ideal capitalist, the self-made man, had greater power than they had suspected—and, perhaps, than anyone could have suspected. And forms of economic organisation which seemed or could be made to seem co-operative were found to be compatible with and even an encouragement to the attitudes of such an individualism.

31. It was not easy to transcend the old jealous regard for the particular privileges of members of the "labour aristocracy", which had animated the old craft guilds and had been an influence of varying strength upon all trade unions and in the trade union movement as a whole: the discovery that the concern for universal rights is the "hidden meaning" of such an attitude is not easy to make. The attempt to reach such an awareness—and its painfulness—is evident in the proposals made by the builders, at the height of the Owenite enthusiasm in the autumn of 1833, to accommodate labourers in their union: "These Lodges should, by degrees, consist of architects, masons, bricklayers, carpenters, slaters, plasterers, plumbers, glaziers, painters; and also quarriers, brickmakers, and labourers as soon as they can be prepared with better habits and more knowledge to enable them to act for themselves, assisted by the other branches who will have an overwhelming interest to improve the mind, morals and general conditions of their families in the shortest time." It was too easy to see the aim of trade unions as the defence of a fellowship and a way of life of workers, not against mistaken ideas of work and life which afflicted other men, but against other men as such: it was difficult to see that, in using their fellowship as a barrier against other men, they were defending neither themselves nor their fellowship, but betraying both.<sup>29</sup>

32. The readiness with which the exclusivist attitude could infiltrate and even take over a venture in co-operative production is well illustrated in Benjamin Jones's chapter on "Boot and Shoe Societies". The other tendency destructive of the revolutionary object of co-operation, to which the co-operative movement was subject, was the accumulation of capital. "By the increase of capital", declared the prospectus of the Ripponden Co-operative Society (the date of the prospectus is either 1833 or 1839), "the working classes may better their condition, if they only *unite* and set their shoulder to the work; by uniting we do not mean strikes and turning out for wages, but like men of one family, strive to begin to work for ourselves." In 1850 the Bury Redemption Society outlined a plan for the accumulation of



capital by means of which the working class would be able to buy up all the property of the kingdom. But, innocent of a systematic analysis of the nature of capital,\* the co-operative movement found itself entrapped in the logic of the process of capital accumulation which they had not suspected it to possess: unwittingly—even unwillingly—the movement found itself becoming an accomplice of the process of capitalist accumulation: an unwitting and an unwilling accomplice in that exploitation of the communal labour, and in that individualist appropriation and distribution of the resulting profit, which is the rationale of capitalism. As early as 1851 the leading spirit of the Christian Socialist movement, John Malcolm Ludlow, expressed his fears of the “spirit of partnership”, manifest in a scheme for a co-operative store, taking precedence over the “spirit of fellowship” which could be fully realised only in a co-operative workshop: unless the employees of a co-operative store are sharers in the profits of the store together with the shareholders, he warned, “the body of subscribers is nothing but a collective capitalist, so to speak, whose hired servant is the distributor; and the bargain between them need be only the old buy-cheap-sell-dear struggle, in which the weaker goes to the wall.” The prescience of his warning is borne out by the large sections of Jones’s book which deal with acrimonious debates concerning the rightness or wrongness of profit-sharing and the payment of bonuses to employees by co-operative associations whose employees were not necessarily also shareholders: it seems fair to say that on the whole a co-operative association was a “better” employer than the ordinary private capitalist—but the relationship remained the old relationship, the old non-identity of interests remained, the conflict was the same conflict—but often exacerbated by the attitude of righteous indignation from behind which the “co-operative” employers refused to consider anything but the outrageousness of their employees’ demands. The situation of the latter, they might have claimed, if they had read Godwin, was that “of a slave, who is endowed with the show and appearance of freedom. What I ask at your hand is, that you would not, without a good and solid meaning, waken all the secret springs of my nature, and call forth the swelling ambition of my soul. Do not fill me with the sublime emotions of independence, and teach me to take up my rest among the stars of heaven, if your ultimate purpose be to draw closer my fetters, and pull me down unwilling to the surface of the earth.”<sup>80</sup>

33. When in February, 1850, the Christian Socialists set up the capital to establish a co-operative working tailors’ association (which it was eventually hoped would be self-supporting) in London, *Cooper’s Journal* greeted the venture with the headline “Good News: The ‘Organisation of Labour’ commenced in London”. To the Chartist who felt the necessity of the revolution and the futility of violence this was the revolution: “Let success crown one experiment in London, and the example will spread. Let the ‘Organization of Labour’ once begin to

\*There are glimpses of a protoMarxist analysis, e.g. in *The Pioneer* of October 13, 1833: “What is capital? ‘It is reserved labour!’ cries M’Culloch. . . . From whom and what was it reserved? From the clothing and food of the wretched.”<sup>81</sup>

prevail among our trades and handicrafts; and it can then scarcely fail to find its way into our great manufacturing enterprises. And if it take root there—can any one doubt that the soil of Old England of which so many millions of acres now lie waste, shall not soon be occupied by happy colonies of brother workers? May the day soon come!” A few years later Walter Cooper, the Owenite tailor and cousin of Thomas Cooper whom the Christian Socialists had appointed manager of the association, wrote of its failure: “We were full of enthusiasm, and, I doubt not, of good intentions; but, alas, how little did we comprehend the greatness of the work in which we were engaged, or anticipate that spirit of self-sacrifice that would be necessary to insure success! We called each other brothers, sang songs about ‘Labour’s social chivalry’, and did wonders in the way of work and profit; and, for four or five months, all went smoothly enough. But the slack season came, for which we had not provided, and brought with it those terrible evils, jealousy and disunion. . . . I believe all of us talked too much about rights, and thought too little about duties.” Over 20 years later the managing director explained the failure of the Shirland Colliery which the South Yorkshire and North Derbyshire Miners’ Association started in 1875 as a co-operative venture and investment: “To go and teach or rather, tell of a co-operative colliery to a class of men who don’t know what co-operation is, who never knew of its working, and who never received a bonus, is just like ‘words, words,’ were to Horatio. At Shirland, the men do not know the principles of co-operation, nor do they believe in its benefits to them. It is something offered to, but not evolved from them. They did not ask for it, nor do some of them desire it.”<sup>82</sup>

34. Other co-operative ventures—especially the co-operative stores—prospered and were profitable investments—much to the disgust of Thomas Cooper who revisited Lancashire in 1869 and 1870 when the boom in co-operative mills was just beginning: a boom which was compared to the speculations in railways in which middle-class entrepreneurs had indulged in the 1840’s, by one middle-class intellectual, the Positivist Frederic Harrison, who had visions of a higher destiny for the working class than that contained in the co-operative movement of which he wrote, in 1864: “it is in fact a mode by which the ringleaders of a dangerous order may be unconsciously bought off, and as such the capitalists now support co-operation loudly and indeed shamelessly.” To the selfish improvidence of the non-co-operators there seemed no alternative but the selfish providence of the co-operators. To this view Ludlow seemed to have capitulated when, with Lloyd Jones—the Owenite fustian-cutter who had been one of the chief promoters of the co-operative store of which Ludlow had had such well-founded suspicions in 1851, he came to write in 1866 a vindication of the utter propriety and safety of an admission of the working class to the electorate. As early as their 1840 pamphlet (vid. Para. 18) Lovett and Collins had written, “*their interests* (i.e. the interests of the working class) *are blended with the interests of property.*” And when Ludlow and Jones argued that the co-operative movement had created “a new type of



working man, endued not only with that honesty and frankness, that kindness and true courtesy, which distinguish the best specimens of his order wherever they may be placed, but with a dignity, a self-respect, a sense of conscious freedom which are peculiar to the co-operator"—they meant in fact nothing more than a new type of property-holder, a new type of capitalist: "nearly 150,000 of the working class have raised themselves collectively, if not individually, by this means alone, into the position hitherto occupied by the shop-keeping class, forming the vast bulk of the £10 occupiers in boroughs; whilst about 50,000—whose business requires premises, if not of freehold tenure, at least held for some fixed interest or term of years—have raised themselves collectively in like manner to a position equivalent to that of the independent classes of county voters, freeholders, copyholders, or leaseholders." The trade unions are further evidence, not of the working class's desire of revolution, but of their individual prudence and of their social reliability. "I shall not refer to the subject of strikes," said Mr. Lowe, in his speech of May 3, 1865, on Mr. Baines's motion for Reform, "but it is, I contend, impossible to believe that the same machinery which is at present brought into play in connection with strikes, would not be applied by the working classes to political purposes. Once give the men votes, and the machinery is ready to launch those votes in one compact mass *upon the institutions and property of the country.*" As if the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, with its 30,000 members, which, in 1865, spent £14,070 4s. 9d. in 'donations, sending members to situations, and beds for non-free members'; £13,785 14s. 9d. for 'sick benefit, stewards, and medical certificates'; £5,184 17s. 4d. for 'superannuation benefit'; £4,887 6s. for 'funeral'; £1,860 for 'accidents', etc., were not an 'institution'! As if the working man's labour were not as truly 'property' as that capital which it enables to accumulate! As if it were likely that the great Trade Societies should have accumulated their capitals of thousands of pounds—tens of thousands—nay, in the case of the Engineers over £100,000—invested them, as many of them have, in Post-Office Savings-Banks at 2½ per cent.; rendered tens of thousands of widows, and of sick men, of the aged and disabled, dependent upon those funds, in order to 'launch' votes in a compact mass at institutions of property!"<sup>33</sup>

## 5. The Victorian solution of the problem of democracy

35. The principle of democracy is the recognition of the common humanity in which all men share equally: the ideal end of democracy, which is the measure of all its efforts and of all that is achieved in its name, is the recognition of this humanity by all men; and the essential factor in the achievement of this end is the recognition by each man of this common humanity which he shares with all his fellows—and the measure of an individual's life, of any success that he may be supposed to have had, is the extent to which he has failed or has succeeded in achieving this recognition. It is clear, then, what will constitute the application of the principle of democracy in the life of the individual and in the life of society as

a whole. It will also be clear that the application of the principle of democracy may not only be obscurely evidenced or even simply ignored in a certain constitution of society, but also that its application in the life of the individual may require him to withdraw his support from such a social system and to endeavour to construct in his own life, in his own relations with his fellow men, the embryo and the foundation of a different social system. The principle of democracy involves the critical and irreverent subjection of every received way of life, every social framework, to the test of its appropriateness to this principle: a complete democrat is even nihilistic in the sense that he accepts as inevitable or immutable no thought or feeling or action of any man—to him any mode of life is nothing in itself, is to be admired, encouraged and enjoyed simply in so far as it represents the idea of the universal humanity.

36. The problem of democracy is its awkwardness: no society and no individual is safe from its criticisms and demands. The Victorian solution of this problem was to ignore its existence: democracy was incorporated in the political arrangements of society as a principle of organization having some—but no fundamental—significance for the lives of men; it was a principle requiring a measure of recognition and encouragement—not one which demanded a revolutionary examination of the life of the individual or of society, a wholesale not to say nihilistic destruction of all other loyalties for the sake of an uncompromising commitment to the one true allegiance. The foundation of the Victorian solution of the problem of democracy was the rape of the democratic imagination of the Victorian working class; the chief architect of the solution was "the member for Birmingham", the right honourable John Bright, and its chief monument is the second Reform Bill of 1867.

37. "I am the great 'terror' of the squires—they seem to be seized by a sort of bucolic mania in dealing with me", wrote Bright to his wife in February, 1866, on the eve of the introduction of Gladstone's Reform Bill—the prelude to the far more "revolutionary" measure which the next year passed through Parliament under the patronage of a Tory Government. But in fact, as Bright himself said on one occasion, he was "the perfect Conservative. I should like to know what there would have been left of Conservatism for Conservatives to conserve at this hour but for me." The real fomenters of revolution, he told the House of Commons in March, 1866, were those who feared and hated—and expressed their fear and hatred—of that revolutionary principle which they thought to be inextricably bound up with democracy and were unable to perceive the possibility of accommodating a version of democracy to the already existing hierarchical system (this was not exactly how Bright put it); and, speaking to the trades unionists in St. James's Hall, London, in December of the same year, he turned the accusation which had been made against him of being a friend of public disorder against his accusers: "I say that Lord Derby, as the representative of his party in Parliament, is himself the fomentor of discord, and that his party, and not our party, is at this moment the



turbulent element in English political society.”<sup>34</sup>

38. “There are actually rich people in this country”, said Bright at Birmingham in October, 1858, “who believe that if every man had a vote it would give him a weapon wherewith to attack their property.” At the time of the French invasion scare two years later, when proposals were made to recruit and arm a Volunteer force, the Duke of Rutland declared that, if working men were armed, he would plant cannon before Belvoir Castle, and raise a corps for its protection from among his dependents. “Personally,” said Bright in the same speech, “I have not the smallest objection to the widest possible suffrage that the ingenuity of man can devise.” Bright’s attitude to the reform of the franchise is most clearly explained in a letter he wrote to Joseph Sturge in November, 1851: “I have never adopted the phrase ‘universal’ or ‘manhood’ in connexion with the franchise, and I think neither term a good one, nor do I think what is expressed by them the best to give a chance of the best Government. At the same time, personally, I have no objection to the widest possible extension of the suffrage, and think the fears which many persons entertain are very childish. We must not however forget that it is not the non-electors only who are to be consulted, nor yet the Radical portion of the Electors; there are the wealthy and timid classes, Tories—Whigs—honest and dishonest of every rank—and the whole makes up an opinion which must be consulted and cannot be disregarded. I am for the widest extension of the suffrage which will meet with any fair amount of acceptance from the public. . . . I have no objection that all should vote, but knowing what public opinion is, were I a Minister, I should propose a rating suffrage with 12 months’ residence, and the payment of *poors’ rate* only due 6 months before the List is made out. . . . I think such a measure would be a moral revolution, and that for ever afterwards there would be no more demand for extension of the suffrage. . . . A change like this is not a trifle, and substantially it would enfranchise everybody, and give I believe a more democratic House than *manhood* without restriction. My restrictions too are not directed against any *class* but operate with a fair equality upon all. I think properly explained to him, any intelligent working man would prefer this plan to ‘universal’.”<sup>35</sup>

39. Properly explained to both the opponents and protagonists of democracy, the Bright interpretation of democracy meant the granting of political rights to a large section of the working class who had proved their capacity to exercise the bourgeois virtues of providence and social decorum—or who could be expected to be encouraged by such an enfranchisement to learn these virtues. “We have”, he said at Manchester in December, 1858, “members of the aristocracy of this country exhibiting themselves frequently upon platforms on various occasions. They tell the people how wonderfully education has advanced; how much Parliament grants every year, and how much voluntary effort does; what a great step the people have taken forward. I wish they would come to the legitimate conclusion after all this praise of the people. Your statisticians tell you that two millions of the

people are subscribers to benefit societies, and that their funds amount to more than nine millions sterling. Is that no proof of providence? Is that no proof of advancement? Who is the man that dare stand before any considerable number of his countrymen, and libel them by saying that the right which Mr. Grey, and which Charles James Fox, advocated for you in 1797, you are still so degraded that you are not fit to be trusted within the year 1858?” “The great secret”, he said in Glasgow a fortnight later, “of raising any man who has been brought up to what may be called the inferior occupations of life, is to find out something to increase his self-respect. . . . I believe that when you admit the general body of our artisans upon the roll of electors, when they can not only attend nominations and hold up their hands and cheer for the successful or popular candidate, but can also go one by one to the polling-booth, and register their votes for the man who shall represent the great interests of Glasgow; my honest, conscientious opinion is, that you will do as much to raise their self-respect, to give them at least the rudiments and elements of the higher class of citizenship, as you can do by all the other means that you now have in operation with a view of improving the condition of the working classes.”<sup>36</sup>

40. “*The English Revolution began yesterday in Hyde Park*”, declared Karl Marx jubilantly on June 25, 1855, the day after “the mob” had responded to a proposal to legislate away their Sunday amusements through a prohibition of Sunday trading and the Sunday running of steamboats and railways, by assailing the carriages in the Park (which catered for middle- and upper-class amusements not covered by the Bill) with cries of “Go to Church!” The class structure of British society, and the existence of a revolutionary class consciousness in the English proletariat, was irrefutably demonstrated; but it was too good to last; the carriages stayed away from the Park for a few weeks, the proposed Bill was withdrawn, but the revolution came to nothing: such exciting polarisations of attitude were rare in the history of Victorian England. F. E. Gillespie’s history of *Labor and Politics in England 1850-1867* and Royden Harrison’s more recently published *Studies in Labour and Politics 1861 to 1881* show that the ever closer attachment of the working-class political attitude to the general functioning of Victorian capitalism was not a development unattended by unseemly skirmishes and affrays and marks of recalcitrance; and, indeed, it was and still is an incomplete achievement, and even in order to succeed it has had to make various concessions—Gillespie points out that the bourgeois radicals of the Manchester School were unable to prevent working-class political pressure from modifying their policy when it was finally accepted by the Liberal party as its policy, during the latter half of the century in the direction of greater intervention in foreign affairs and, at home, in labour disputes. It was still recognisably the policy of the Manchester School—“peace, retrenchment, and reform”—which became the policy of the Liberal party in the latter half of the 19th century; but it was also a policy distinctly modified by and making some concessions to working-class “prejudices”



with which Bright for one never had any sympathy.<sup>37</sup>

41. But capitalism made only concessions: before which the revolutionary democratic imagination of labour capitulated. Capitalism remained the prevalent assumption of the way in which human society was to be ordered, from which some deviations might be allowed, to which some modifications might be made, in order to accommodate notions of human fraternity and equality. The explanation of this triumph, perhaps, lies not so much in the atrophy of the revolutionary imagination of the working class, but rather in the feebleness and inadequacy of such imagination as it had existed and did exist. The widespread existence of a revolutionary feeling among the politically conscious section of the English working class during the early 19th century is undeniable; but it is equally undeniable that a coherent and convincing revolutionary strategy and policy was lacking. In the April-May, 1851, number of *The English Republic* W. J. Linton (vid. Para. 26) addressed his fellow Chartists on the decline of their movement: "You have not earnestness enough to form a party. You hardly care enough about the matter to amuse yourselves at a lecture or a meeting, where fools call you patriots. You don't mind going sometimes the length of a street or two, to be tickled with idle talk, if there is nothing to pay for admission: but this is the gross amount of your 'patriotism'. Your earnestness never cost the mass of you one wink of sleep or one half-pint of beer. . . . You have no party, you have no principles, you have no plan of action." But neither Linton nor Harney nor even Jones—for all the tuition Marx and Engels gave him—could produce a coherent, convincing and consistent plan of action which would present the revolution as both a real alternative to the existing social system and a course of action which the individual could actually adopt. For all their dedication, for all their sensitivity to the exploitation and degradation of the worker under capitalism, even the most radical Chartists failed to formulate a critique of the principle of capitalist accumulation as such: they failed to see in it the total repudiation of that principle of democracy which they sought to establish in their own lives and wished to see become the rule of society as a whole: the "declaration of social rights" adopted by the Chartist National Executive (dominated by Harney's followers) in May, 1850, demanded, not the overthrow, but merely the better regulation, of capitalism in the interests of society as a whole, and such a regulation was all that Linton proposed in his "republican measures" for the "organization of labour on the land" and for "the organization of labour through credit"—not the abolition of the inescapably exploitive relationship of capital and labour, but the guaranteeing to labour of a "just reward" by the provision of credit by the State. If the revolution was unable to secure deep roots in the imagination of the English working class as a whole, part of the explanation must be the failure of its most eloquent exponents to understand and to convey its meaning fully. And in place of the vision of the real revolution the counter-revolution was able to deck itself out in a costume bearing the spurious marks of revolution and democracy.<sup>38</sup>

42. "In the 19th century the Northumbrians show the world what can be done with Iron and Coal" ran the inscription under the romantic mural of the Tyneside ironworkers painted in 1861 by William Bell Scott, the artist and friend of Linton. Nineteenth-century Victorian capitalism—helped perhaps by that very crudeness and immaturity which also may have excited hopes and expectations of revolution (vid. Para. 27)—could assume the aspect of an adventure and bestow upon the individual capitalist the glamour and the romance of a pioneer. Perhaps this is a part of the explanation of the fact noted in connection with the social criticism of 19th-century England by both Edward Thompson and F. E. Gillespie—namely, its concentration upon the inherited wealth of the landed aristocracy as the real social inquiry and its generally equivocal if not actually tolerant attitude towards the accumulated wealth of the industrial capitalist. "Throughout the 19th century", writes Thompson, "the urban worker made articulate the hatred for the 'landed aristocrat' which perhaps his grandfather had nourished in secret: he liked to see the squire cast in villainous melodramas, and he preferred even a Board of Guardians to the charity of a Lady Bountiful: he felt that the landowner had no 'right' to his wealth whereas, if only by foul means, the mill-owner had 'earned' his." During the 1850's, Gillespie points out, Chartist attacks upon private property in land increased in number and "furnished a common ground upon which the middle and working classes could stand, at least to the extent of denouncing the landed interests, however much they might differ as to a theoretical justification and the ultimate goal. . . . The land question persisted from that day on as a bond between working men and Radicals, the latter labouring persistently with the support of the former to establish 'free trade in land' by the abolition of primogeniture and entail." This double-headed attitude to property\* aided the diffusion of the naive populism of which John Bright made himself the chief spokesman during the 1850's and 1860's which saw the real division of English society as, not that between the exploiters and exploited, but that between the industrious and the idle classes: it was the assumption of the reality of the latter division which enabled Bright to claim—and disposed others to accept his claim—that he was "one of the people": "I am a working man as much as you", he told a meeting of the electors and non-electors of Durham on the eve of his election as their Member of Parliament in July, 1843. "My father was as poor as any man in this crowd. He was of your own body, entirely. He boasts not—nor do I—of birth, nor of great family distinctions. What he has made, he has made by his own industry and successful exertions. I have no interest in the extravagance of government; I have no interest in seeking appointments under any government; I have nothing to gain by being the tool of any party. I come before you as the friend of my own class and order; as one of the people; as one who

\*It is well to note that even Marx himself found it difficult to get a congress of the first International Association of Workingmen which he took so much trouble to organize and educate to pass a motion in favour of land nationalization: Proudhonist schemes for national credit were much more popular.<sup>40</sup>



would, on all occasions, be the firm defender of your rights, and the asserter of all those privileges to which you are justly entitled.”<sup>39</sup>

43. “I am tired of agitation,” he wrote to his friend Cobden (August 21, 1859), “but I would give something to lift up our population into freemen, and to bring down the lofty pretensions of the ruling class.” The Chartist agitation of the 1830’s and 1840’s had arisen partly out of anger that the working class had been “betrayed” by the middle class at the time of the 1832 Reform Bill; but that this attitude was not the “instinctive class hatred” of the proletariat for the bourgeoisie for which Marx yearned, is made evident by the willingness with which some at least of the Chartists were prepared to take seriously Joseph Sturge’s abortive proposals for an alliance between working-class and middle-class radicals in a Complete Suffrage Union (1842). When the National Parliamentary and Financial Reform Association was founded in 1849, with the object of promoting Joseph Hume’s “Little Charter” (householder suffrage, vote by ballot, triennial parliaments and a more equitable distribution of seats), Harney might declare that its policy—and that of the freehold land scheme begun by Cobden—was “to make use of the proletarians to establish bourgeois supremacy” (*Democratic Review*, February, 1850). But if the object of the working class was not social revolution but social welfare, it could be argued that the establishment of a suitably tempered bourgeois supremacy might be no bad thing: “That the principles of Chartism continue to spread”, declared *The Weekly Advertiser and Artizan’s Companion* in April, 1852, “we believe, but little thanks are due to an Ernest Jones and a Fergus O’Connor for it. . . . The consummation will be brought about rather by the quiet, moderate and subtle tactics of such leaders as Hume, Cobden, and Walmsley.” (Walmsley was the president of the Reform Association.)<sup>41</sup>

44. The second Reform Bill of 1867 was the triumph of a derevolutionized English working class. It was the triumph of a naive populism and of a simple moral affirmation of democracy over both the fear and hatred of democracy felt by some, and the revolutionary hopes and expectations of it felt by others—the triumph of an attitude achieved in part by the facility with which at the right moment it could assume the appearance of one or the other defeated constellation of feelings. It was a triumph prepared for by a series of great events which vindicated the position of John Bright and his idea of the people: the Crimean War was followed by the Indian Mutiny (which enabled Bright to point to the large interest in the prosperity of India shared by the people of India and the English commercial class, and opposed by and to the class interest of the privileged minority, the East India Company); and to the Indian Mutiny there succeeded the American Civil War: Marx was fond of affirming that, “As in the 18th century, the American War of Independence sounded the tocsin for the European middle class, so in the 19th century, the American Civil War sounded it for the European working class.” But Charles Francis Adams more correctly summed up its significance when he said that if the North won the war John Bright would be the most powerful man in England.<sup>42</sup>

45. Capitalist society is sustained by its ability to imitate the form of a democracy which in reality it traduces and tramples underfoot. A good idea of the way in which it was possible for the 1867 Reform Bill to achieve a convincing imitation can be obtained from Dr. Royden Harrison’s *Studies in Labour and Politics 1861 to 1881* which I have already cited and which did a great deal to stimulate me to make the investigations upon which my own very tentative study is based. I think that on the basis of his analysis it is possible to make certain suggestions as to why it was possible to persuade a large section of the more articulate and politically more active members of the working class to accept the imitation for the real thing. In the first place, as Harrison makes clear, there were those who had simply sold out to the middle-class reformers—who had in fact become the paid electioneering agents of the Liberal party. But perhaps this selling out was not quite so obvious and straightforward a process as it seems. The sharp outlines of the process which we see were blurred and softened by the good offices of individuals such as the Republican Member of Parliament for Halifax, Sir James Stansfeld (who seems to have become a sort of father confessor to the quondam bricklayer and secretary of the Reform League, George Howell, who wrote to him, “I cannot always lend myself to all the foolish movements of working men”),<sup>43</sup> and—of course—Samuel Morley, who believed in presiding at public meetings at which “agitators” such as Ernest Jones made inflammatory speeches, and who contributed large sums to the exchequer of the Reform League on the condition that not a shilling of it should be spent on assisting working-class candidates at the 1868 General Election. To the industrious working-class politician what was objectively a bribe and a mere crumb from the rich man’s table might, under circumstances of an indeed insidious and condescending approbation, appear to be a reward. The acceptance of the 1867 settlement as at least a great democratic step forward even by those who saw in it no concrete possibility of their being bribed or rewarded, we can rightly call blindness and self-delusion; but the fact that these men continued—and still continue—to think and to seek to justify themselves in such terms is an indication that the revolution has not been suppressed but only sidetracked, the apprehension of revolution has been deluded but not destroyed: even the counter-revolution must base itself on the argument that it achieves the goal of the revolution, the wellbeing of the *whole* people, better than the revolution itself could. The need to deceive the principle of democracy is a more revolutionary condition than the permission to ignore it; as a debatable proposition at least the revolution seems to have secured a foothold in the conscious mind of man from which it cannot be dislodged.

46. Perhaps it is even in terms of the continuation of the revolution in another guise, that we must seek to understand the apathy and absence of protest with which the unbribed and unrewarded mass of the working class responded to the defection of their betters. Their superiors in the hierarchy of labour experienced the joys of a recognition of their positive freedom in the bestowal of further channels or



corridors along which they might direct their socially responsible energies (a recognition paltry and squalidly inadequate by the standards of the pure revolutionary—and yet it was a recognition); the mass of the people were allowed to remain sunk in an undisturbed wage slavery—yet even this undisturbed wage slavery allowed them an experience of an area of negative freedom which was at times at least perhaps more vivid than anything that could be achieved by “labour aristocrats” bloated with confusing notions of social responsibility. The impersonal contract of the wage—of a specific service given for a specific return—allows its slave to retain a political apathy which is not mere indifference but a healthily nihilistic, potentially creative attitude towards the dubious versions of the common good and of social justice which the class society seeks diligently to foist upon the “labour aristocrats” but which it more carelessly (perhaps it is even somewhat embarrassed?) offers to the “residuum”. It would of course be ridiculous to say that the revolution flourishes in this situation; but it would surely be equally ridiculous to deny that it continues to exist and to exert its influence.

47. I plead guilty to the charge of seeking the revolution everywhere—and even, of claiming that I have found it. The revolution is the perception of things as they are, above all it is the perception of ourselves and of our fellow men as we are and as they are: a universal humanity: it is this perception uncompromisingly pursued which transforms and transcends the natural fear with which we contemplate a world whose ultimate alienness and unmanageability will always remain as irreducible as our fear—but no less than our fear, allowing through full acceptance the transformation of a source of weakness into a source of strength, since through acceptance we transform the prison of our condition into a place of vantage, of freedom and complete openness, into that condition of the universal man of which Pico della Mirandola dreamed. I confess that to me the revolution seems to be everywhere: it is work in my own imaginings and in those of my friends and equally at work, though differently, in the psychological monstrosity of nuclear warfare which I cannot understand and in the material misery of the mass of my fellow-men which I have never experienced. I am not optimistic; I simply accept the intimations of my experience; I do not know what is the good of a revolution that does not manifest itself; but I do think that it is good for the revolutionary that he should know that he is not seeking to create anything new but simply to bring to light what already is.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1963, pp194, 591, 592.
- <sup>2</sup>ibid., pp78, 79, 94.
- <sup>3</sup>ibid., pp583, 564, 570, 590-1.
- <sup>4</sup>ibid., pp668, 599-600, 682-3, 696, 691, 709.
- <sup>5</sup>ibid., pp714, 715.
- <sup>6</sup>ibid., pp 616; there is an excellent biography of William Thompson by R. K. Pankhurst, London, 1950.
- <sup>7</sup>Donald Read, *Peterloo. The "Massacre" and its Background*, Manchester, 1958, chapters 5 and 10; Joseph Hamburger, *James Mill and the Art of Revolution*, New Haven, 1963, particularly chapter 4 and the analysis of the size of the May, 1832, meeting of the Birmingham Political Union, pp132-8; R. N. Soffer, "Attitudes and Allegiances in the Unskilled North" in *The International Review of Social History*, vol. 10, Assen, 1965.
- <sup>8</sup>Graham Wallas, *The life of Francis Place*, London, 1898, pp145-6.
- <sup>9</sup>ibid., pp36-7.
- <sup>10</sup>ibid., pp172, 171, 174, 173n.
- <sup>11</sup>ibid., pp357, 368-9.
- <sup>12</sup>Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical*, 1842, new edition London and Manchester n.d. (1859), pp143-4, 222, 224.
- <sup>13</sup>Bamford, *An Account of the Arrest and Imprisonment of Samuel Bamford*.
- <sup>14</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p692; Bamford, *Passages*, pp174-6; *Hours in the Bowers. Poems, etc.*, Manchester, 1834, p12.
- <sup>15</sup>*Passages*, pp242, 310, 395.
- <sup>16</sup>Bright to Cobden, April 10, 1842, British Museum Additional MSS., vol. 43, 383. (Henceforward BM Add. MSS.)
- <sup>17</sup>William Lovett and John Collins, *Chartism: A New Organisation of The People*, London, 1840, pp22-7; on the subject of Chartist preparations for violent insurrection an interesting if not wholly credible account is given in the autobiography of Thomas Ainge Devyr, the Irishman who was secretary to the Northern Political Union from January, 1838, to January, 1840, when he fled to America: Devyr claimed that 60,000 pikes were made and shafted on the banks of the Tyne and Wear between August and November, 1838: *The Odd Book of the Nineteenth Century*, Greenpoint, New York, 1882, pp171, 177-8. A. R. Schoyen, who cites Devyr's claim in his life of Harney, *The Chartist Challenge*, London, 1958, gives an interesting account of the development of the political attitude of the young enthusiast who wrote in *The Northern Star* in February, 1839, "The men of the North are armed, I invite you to follow their example."; cf. also Asa Briggs, ed., *Chartist Studies*, London, 1959 (paperback ed. 1962), particularly, Briggs, "National Bearings", pp301-2, and J. F. C. Harrison, "Chartism in Leicester", pp133-4.
- <sup>18</sup>Letter to Holyoake, May, 1856, quoted by Peter Cadogan, "Harney and Engels", in *International Review of Social History*, vol 10, Assen, 1965, p81; on the 1858 conference vid. F. E. Gillespie, *Labor and Politics in England 1850-1867*, Durham, N.C., 1927, pp161-3; Jones to Marx, February, 1865, quoted by Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics 1861-1881*, London, 1965, p118.
- <sup>19</sup>*The Life of Thomas Cooper Written by Himself*, London, 1872, pp197, 216-7; his beautiful "sermon" to the colliers on the text "Thou shalt not kill"—an indictment of all governments throughout history—is given in full, pp187-90.
- <sup>20</sup>ibid., pp146-7, 169, 173.
- <sup>21</sup>ibid., *The Purgatory of Suicides*, London, 1845, 3rd ed. 1853, pp162-3 (book II, stanzas 11-12), 187-8.



- <sup>22</sup>ibid., pp44-51 (book I, stanzas 124-45), 227-32 (VI, 115-29), 212, 223 (VI, 70, 102), 361 (X, 126).
- <sup>23</sup>*Cooper's Journal: or, Unfettered Thinker and Plain Speaker for Truth, Freedom, and Progress*, London, 1850, pp1, 152.
- <sup>24</sup>ibid., pp444, 446; Samuel Smiles, *Self Help*, London, 1859, Ward, Lock ed., n.d., pp26, 333-4.
- <sup>25</sup>*Cooper's Journal*, op. cit., p421.
- <sup>26</sup>W. J. Linton, *The English Republic*, vol. 1, London, 1851, Soffer, op. cit., p437; *Cooper's Journal*, op. cit., pp422, 200, 376, 321, 322, 113.
- <sup>27</sup>Quoted by Thompson, op. cit., there is a good selection from Owen's writings in the Everyman's Library, London, 1927, introduced by G. D. H. Cole, whose life of Owen has been recently reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1965.
- <sup>28</sup>Thompson, op. cit., pp 829-30; S. and B. Webb, *A History of Trade Unionism*, London, 1920, revised ed., Appendix 2, pp732-3.
- <sup>29</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p244; on the "labour aristocracy", vid. E. J. Hobsbawm, "The Labour Aristocracy in Nineteenth Century Britain" in J. Saville (ed.), *Democracy and the Labour Movement*, London, 1954, reprinted in Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, London, 1965; Royden Harrison, op. cit., pp25-39; Asa Briggs, "The Language of Class in Early Nineteenth Century England", in Briggs and Saville (eds.), *Essays in Labour History* (which also contains a stimulating essay on "Nineteenth Century Co-operation: From Community Building to Shop-keeping"), London, 1960.
- <sup>30</sup>Benjamin Jones, *Co-operative Production*, Oxford, 1894, 2 vols., ch. 19 (pp401-36); Thompson, op. cit., p ; Jones, op. cit., p98; Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism*, Aarhus, 1962, pp186-91; Jones, e.g. pp164, 273, 327, 222-3, 263-4; William Godwin, *The Enquirer*, London, 1797, p97.
- <sup>31</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p
- <sup>32</sup>*Cooper's Journal*, op. cit., p99; Jones, op. cit., pp113, 524.
- <sup>33</sup>The passage from Cooper's autobiography is quoted by Royden Harrison, op. cit., pp19-20; Frederic Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, London, 1911, p353; Lovett and Collins, op. cit., p15; J. M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, *Progress of the Working Class 1832-1867*.
- <sup>34</sup>Bright to his wife, University College London Library Bright MSS; Asa Briggs, *Victorian People. A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851-1867*, London, 1954, Penguin Books ed. 1965, pp208-9; John Bright, *Speeches*, ed. J. E. Thorold Rogers, 1868, 1 vol. ed. 1869, pp396, 398.
- <sup>35</sup>Letter to Sturge, BM Add. MSS 43,723; *Speeches*, op. cit., p284.
- <sup>36</sup>*Speeches*, pp299-300, 312-13; cf. p328.
- <sup>37</sup>Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Britain*, London (2nd ed.), 1962, pp434-45; cf. the account of the demonstrations in Thomas Frost (Chartist journalist), *Forty Years' Recollections: Literary and Political*, London, 1880, pp258-62; Gillespie, op. cit., pp79-80 and passim.
- <sup>38</sup>*The English Republic*, vol. 1, pp175, 177; on the proposed system of national credit, pp148, 157 (the articles on this subject were also printed in Harney's journal, *The Friend of the People*; on Harney and the "declaration of social rights" vid. Schoyen, op. cit., pp198-9.
- <sup>39</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p229; Gillespie, op. cit., G. M. Trevelyan, *The Life of John Bright*, London, 1913, p113.
- <sup>40</sup>vid. Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, London, 1965, particularly pp129-30, 143, 150, 154-6, 164.
- <sup>41</sup>Gillespie, pp86, 88; Preston W. Slosson, *The Decline of the Chartist Movement*, New York, 1916, p113; Bright to Cobden, BM Add. MSS 43,384.
- <sup>42</sup>vid. Trevelyan, op. cit., pp236, 245, 304; Royden Harrison, op. cit., pp67-9.
- <sup>43</sup>Royden Harrison, op. cit., p201.

NEXT MONTH'S  
ANARCHY  
WILL  
DISCUSS  
THE PROVOS





**A detail from William Bell Scott's "Iron and Coal", one of a series of murals painted in 1861 at Wallington Hall, Northumberland. Martin Small comments: "Nineteenth-century Victorian capitalism—helped perhaps by that very crudeness and immaturity which also may have excited hopes and expectations of revolution could assume the aspect of an adventure and bestow upon the individual capitalist the glamour and the romance of a pioneer. Perhaps this is a part of the explanation of the fact noted in connection with the social criticism of 19th-century England by both Edward Thompson and F. E. Gillespie—namely, its concentration upon the inherited wealth of the landed aristocracy as the real social iniquity and its generally equivocal if not actually tolerant attitude towards the accumulated wealth of the industrial capitalist."**